1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

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XVI. Julius Bailey and ox cart at Sapelo

[following p. xxxii-U]

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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Tin City

EASTWARD FROM SAVANNAH IN WEED-GROWN FIELDS lies Tin City, born of the depression and nurtured by the lean years that have followed. The little settlement, with its uncertain lanes winding through a maze of grass and tall shrubbery, stretches out over two hundred acres of land where long ago slaves labored in the black muck of rice fields.

To the west and south this land is touched by the ragged fringe of Savannah; to the north it sweeps away to the murky waters of the Savannah River. In 1819 the city of Savannah condemned the wet-culture rice lands and attempted to build up the unhealthy, low-lying acres with leaves and trash. With the passing years the place has been marked with peculiar ridges and mounds, the result of this building-up process. A wild growth of tall greenery covers the land.

About 1929 Louis Ellis, an old Negro who had been evicted from his home for non-payment of rent, secured permission from Savannah to settle on the land. His shack of discarded tin and his patch of a garden soon attracted other poverty stricken Negroes, and around him grew up a small community, self sufficient in its rent-free houses and its produce of garden and river. Although some of the settlers have abandoned the community and only about twenty remain, Tin City still leads its own independent existence. Within its precincts the fresh atmosphere of a country district prevails, for here and there a clump of chinaberry trees or an oak tree spreads shade, rows of sugar cane and

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
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TIN CITY

green corn grow tall, and sweet potato and pumpkin vines wander at random. The rusty little huts are built of scrap tin, bits of cast-off shed roof, salvagings from automobile junk yards, even discarded signs advertising soft drinks or headache tablets. Each house is surrounded by a garden, fenced either with uneven poles driven into the earth or with ingenious odds and ends of junk. Now and then through the coils of an old bed spring that serves as a fence a wild morning glory vine climbs riotously, or beside a wall hangs a yellow gourd effectively decorative above a row of "greens."

Two men claim the mayoralty of the settlement. One, through natural ability, has held the office almost from the founding of the town. The other, settling later, simply announced that he was mayor. Both officials have a following of political supporters.

Nathaniel John Lewis,* the first mayor, has a neat little one-room dwelling behind a board fence. As he politely apologized for not being at his best, a certain amount of schooling was evident in his speech, which was extremely soft, slow, and careful. He smiled with grim amusement when we asked if he knew anything about conjure or spells.

"Cunjuh?" he repeated. "That's what is wrong with this ahm of mine. As I sit heah, I know that my enemy brought about this affliction.[15] One night two, three yeahs ago, I put out my hand to open my gate. Pain went into my palm jus like stabbin with a shahp needle. This ahm has been no use since then."

"Perhaps it is rheumatism?" we suggested.

"No, sir. It isn't. I know. An cunjuh must be fought with cunjuh.[6] If I know my enemy's name I could get somethin frum a cunjuh doctuh to help me seek revenge. But I am helpless."

"What would the doctor do about it?" we asked.

* *Nathaniel John Lewis, Tin City.*

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White Bluff

HUGE, MOSS-HUNG OAKS FORM A CANOPY AND CAST filigreed shadows upon the White Bluff Road, which passes directly through the quiet Negro community of White Bluff, eight miles southeast of Savannah.

Winding roads turn from the main highway and terminate in the various sections which form the settlement and which are known as Nicholsonboro, Rose Dhu, Twin Hill, and Cedar Grove. The sections east of the White Bluff Road are on the Vernon River. It is here that many of the inhabitants make their living by catching crab and fish which they sell in the city markets. West of the highway the narrow roads lead through thickly wooded areas of great beauty. Along these roads families have cleared small tracts and built their homes, reserving garden space for flowers and vegetables. In the summer wild crepe myrtle trees, with blossoms as luscious a red as the heart of the watermelon, contrast colorfully with the bright blue paint on the doors and trimmings of some of the houses.

The White Bluff Road, which for two miles forms the main street of the community, passes the houses of other residents set well back from the road. Most of them are small and unpretentious but well kept. At intervals of perhaps half a mile are three rural grocery stores; farther along is a whitewashed church with red and blue glass windows, and at the farthest extremity of the settlement is a similar but larger church.

The inhabitants, of which there are approximately four

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
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ting on the front porch of Liza Basden's * small, compactly constructed brown house, we listened to her comments about the prevailing beliefs and customs. The scene before us was restful. The garden planted at the sides and front of the house was enclosed by a low wire fence. Within this enclosure a number of dogs and chickens scuttled about. At a short distance from the house stood an iron pump and an immense rusted iron pot, probably used in the past for boiling clothes. On all sides as far as the eye could see were vast stretches of green land, shaded by massive-trunked, moss-draped trees and covered with an abundance of semi-tropical foliage and underbrush. Here and there could be glimpsed the slanting roofs of neighboring houses.

When we first arrived Liza, a pretty golden-skinned, rather heavy-set woman about eighty years of age, and a small black grandchild were the only occupants of the porch. She told us she had recently come home from a visit to children in the North. Presently her husband and a daughter approached without speaking and sat down unobtrusively in a corner. For the most part they listened to the conversation, contributing only an occasional remark.

"I wuz bawn with a caul," Liza told us, pausing in her task of peeling and eating figs from the pan that she held in her lap. "That means I see ghos.[4] Least I could see em till aftuh I stop havin chillun. Then I stop seein em.

"Three of my chillun they bawn with cauls too. They wuz always skedduh than othuhs. They wuz always fraid of the dahk an nevuh lak tuh go off by themselfs. I nevuh know jis wut they see."

"What did the ghost that you saw look like?" we inquired.

A reflective expression crossed Liza's round pleasant face and she nodded her gray head with its neatly pinned braids.

"They peah jis as nachral as anybody. Most of em ain got no heads. Jis go right along down the path.[59] One time

* *Liza Basden, Harris Neck.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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Possum Point

491 A WINDING TREE-SHADED DIRT ROAD LEADS FROM Darien up the Altamaha to the Negro community of Possum (132) Point. The freshets in the section rise in the rainy season and the road is often flooded. On either side the trees are mirrored in the shallow water which surrounds them. In the •137 spring against the fresh green of the trees and foliage there is the soft color of wild honeysuckle and Cherokee Rose. Through the thickly-massed trees the sun filters dimly; a misty, unreal atmosphere overhangs the entire scene.

342 Set back from the roadway are occasional small dwelling places, with boards turned dun-colored from age and expo-351 sure. Neatly tended vegetable and flower gardens stretch out to the front and sides of the houses. The owners can be found industriously working in the gardens, sitting on the 461 porches, or gathered in little groups along the road. Here (491) and there small bridges span the road, and at each of these a number of persons are often seen leisurely fishing, their long bamboo poles forming graceful arcs from the bank to the water.

115 We had been told that Alec Anderson was an old man and one who would be able to enlighten us regarding the beliefs prevalent in that section. We stopped a few times to inquire 491 where he lived. After continuing for several miles, the road turned to the right. It swerved again a short distance later and continued in a narrow, uneven pathway through the 361 woods. This section was but sparsely settled and we glimpsed a cabin only now and then.

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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grape arbor and spreading live oaks. On the side road stood three stately pine trees from which hung silvery festoons of Spanish moss. Catherine was black, small, and lively at sixty-nine.

"Ise bawn in Meridian," she said, "but Ise lib mos muh life heah. Muh people belong tuh duh Atwoods uh Darien an tings heah on duh ilun is pretty much duh way dey wuz deah. Some tings is changed wut hadduh change, lak wen we hab a fewnul duh unduhtakuh come an git duh body an dey dohn lak yuh tuh hab no settin-up. In duh ole days we would sing an make prayuh all night an dey would come an measure duh body wid a string tuh make duh coffin tuh bury em in. Dey use tuh alluz sen yuh home tuh bury[1] ef dey could git duh money but dey ain eben alluz do dat no mo. Dey nebuh use tuh bury no strainjuhs in duh buryin[2] groun but heah dat ain kep strick needuh."

We asked about the dances and festivals of her youth. "We use tuh hab big times duh fus hahves,[35] an duh fus ting wut growed we take tuh duh chuch so as ebrybody could hab a piece ub it. We pray obuh it an shout. Wen we hab a dance, we use tuh shout in a ring. We ain hab wut yuh call a propuh dance tuhday.

"One uh duh dances wuz call duh Buzzud Lope.[17] It's a long time sence we done it, but I still membuh it. We ain hab much music in doze days but dey use a drum tuh call duh people tuhgedduh wen dey gonuh hab games aw meetin.[36] It sho bin a long time sence I tought bout dem days."

Catherine told us that Ryna Johnson, who lived about a mile down the Harrington Road, was one of the oldest people on the island. Leaving the main highway, we followed the narrow, less traversed side road. It was a heavily wooded section. We viewed the massive-trunked hoary oak trees through a misty curtain of hanging moss. The fences along the road were covered with honeysuckle and wild grape. Shortly before we arrived at our destination, the road divided

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

to give way to a growth of towering oaks; then it joined again, resuming its winding trail through the quiet, shadowed countryside.

The little settlement now known as Harrington was formerly the property of the Demere family. A little less than a mile north of this settlement was Harrington Hall, home of Raymond Demere, who came to this country with Oglethorpe after serving ten years under Lord Harrington at Gibraltar.

To the left of the road was a small unpainted store operated by Ryna Johnson's daughter with whom she lived. Various advertisements on the front of the small building gave splashes of color to the green of trees and foliage.

Set back from the store was Ryna's house, surrounded by an expanse of short grass upon which a horse was grazing. The house was weathered with age, as were the vertical boards of the fence that enclosed the garden; here and there in the fence a new unpainted board, regardless of length, had replaced an old, and the top presented an irregular, jagged pattern. The cabin was the usual two-room affair but with a hall through the center and a lean-to in the back. The walls were papered with newspapers and, although there was a motley collection of objects and furniture, everything was scrupulously clean.

Ryna * was blind from cataracts and had not been feeling very well; so she had just got up from bed. Although her body was bent and very feeble, her mind was still clear.

"Ise bout eighty-five yeahs ole, but I caahn tell zackly. I belong tuh duh Coupers wen I wuk on duh plantation. It bin sech a long time I mos stop studyin bout dem days. But I membuh we use tuh hab good times."

In answer to our inquiry regarding any Africans whom she had known during plantation days, Ryna told us, "Alexanduh, Jummy, an William, dey is all African. I membuh ole William well an he tell me lots bout times in Africa. Dey

* *Ryna Johnson, Harrington, St. Simons Island.*

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina .

Foreword

The Sea Islands are low and flat, and they have a beauty beyond description. When I was a child growing up in the South Carolina lowcountry, we used to take Sunday afternoon drives. If we went down from Charleston across the Ashley River and Wappoo Creek onto James Island and then across the Stono River onto Johns Island, we saw great live oaks leaning dreamily over the road. I remember (or perhaps I imagine) that their low branches, almost hidden by gloomy, gray moss, seemed to enclose the road into long miles of gray tunnel. Here and there we passed through swampy lowlands. I was told that in such places snakes and alligators (and haunts and plat-eyes) were lying in wait for bad little boys and girls. The tangled vines and underbrush had a menacing and sinister beauty. Here and there, too, the oak-lined avenue was broken by fields and pastures. Mules and cows dozed and switched flies under a torrid sun. Rainfall seemed an ancient memory: there were spots where the grass sometimes seemed to have abandoned the effort to be green. And here and there families of black people waved from the porches of small, gray, weather-stained cabins. Shouting children and barking dogs chased one another across neatly swept yards. I can still recall the fresh clouds of fragrance wafted in from the nearby salt marsh and the soft sound of pine needles rustling in the breeze.

Atlantic waves break upon a series of barrier islands all along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. Tidal streams and inlets, draining an intricate system of shallow, marsh-filled coastal lagoons, separate them from the mainland and from one another. From Waties Island in the mouth of Little River near the North and South Carolina line south past the wide beaches and thick dunes of the Grand Strand; past Pawleys and North islands to Georgetown; from South, Cedar, and Murphy islands to Cape Romaine; down past Bull, Capers, and Dewees islands and the Isle of Palms to Charleston; from James and Johns, past Kiawah, Wad-

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Table 1. Land Use for BCD Region

Category	*Acres*	*% of Total*
Developed areas		
Urban uses	75,000	4.29
Residential	21,000	1.20
Commercial	3,500	0.20
Industrial	12,600	0.72
Public and other	37,900	2.17
Agricultural uses		
Cropland and pasture	178,800	10.23
Forest and woodlands (excluding swampland forests)	861,740	49.30
Undeveloped areas		
Marsh and swampland	416,600	23.83
Inland waterways	140,800	8.06
Total	1,747,940	100.00

Source: BCD Council of Governments, *Regional Housing Market Analysis*, 1975, p. 5; figuring corrected.

the islands to the mainland before 1940. Though considerable sums of money have been expended within recent years on the construction of long, narrow bridges to span the Atlantic coast, ocean recesses, rivers, and streams, the more remote islands, such as Sandy and Daufuski, continue to be inaccessible except by boat.[7] Most of the Sea Islands remain very sparsely settled despite the population growth brought on by recent industrialization and commercialization. The landscape is pastoral and mysterious compared to inland areas of the United States. Most islands are characterized by graceful palmetto trees, expansive green terrain, and atmospheric haze. The landscape in fact bears a striking resemblance to the topography of such coastal countries as Nigeria, Ghana, Angola, and Liberia, the tropical homelands of the Sea Islanders' ancestors.[8]

Electricity came to the more remote islands only as recently as the 1960s. Streetlights rarely line the narrow roadways of even the more developed islands, and in late evening the overhanging trees give the roads a ghostly allure. After nightfall it is literally impossible to see even two feet ahead.[9]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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Brick Baptist Church, St. Helena Island, S.C. From the Penn Historical Collection. (Permission granted by Penn Community Services, Inc., St. Helena Island, South Carolina.)

[p. 254]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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Gullahs and the Carolina Lowcountry. (Personal Collection.)

[p. 327]

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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Mrs. Betsy Pinckney

DON'T LET THE RAIN CATCH YOU

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I remember in 1907 we had a tornado on Saxby place. I stand in my door, and my grandma say, "I going now." And I say, "Yes'm, Grandma, I see you going. Don't let the rain catch you." And you know, the wind pick up the house, just as natural as that. And it carry 'em about two tasks [a task is twenty-one rows in a field]. And my grandma lay down on the stomach and hold on to the wire fence, to the post. Yessir, I know that! And I there home whooping and hollering, "Oh Lord, that big air cloud carry Grandma!" That's right!

(804)

We had another storm in 1911. I cook peas and rice that day. It was a Sunday. Josh was laying 'cross the bed sleeping. I lean against that post and every time I feel that house shake, I say "Josh, get up. You better get up and see he going to storm." You see, I had seen one. Done gone 'cross one in 1886.

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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[p.23]

4: Caravan & Caravan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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2. THE STORM

THE PRESENT

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

IS PASSING OVER

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
MN23 Sea Islanders MN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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6. AIN'T YOU GOT A

[p.138]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE?

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PROGRESS ON JOHNS ISLAND

[p. 139]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
MM23 Sea Islanders MM23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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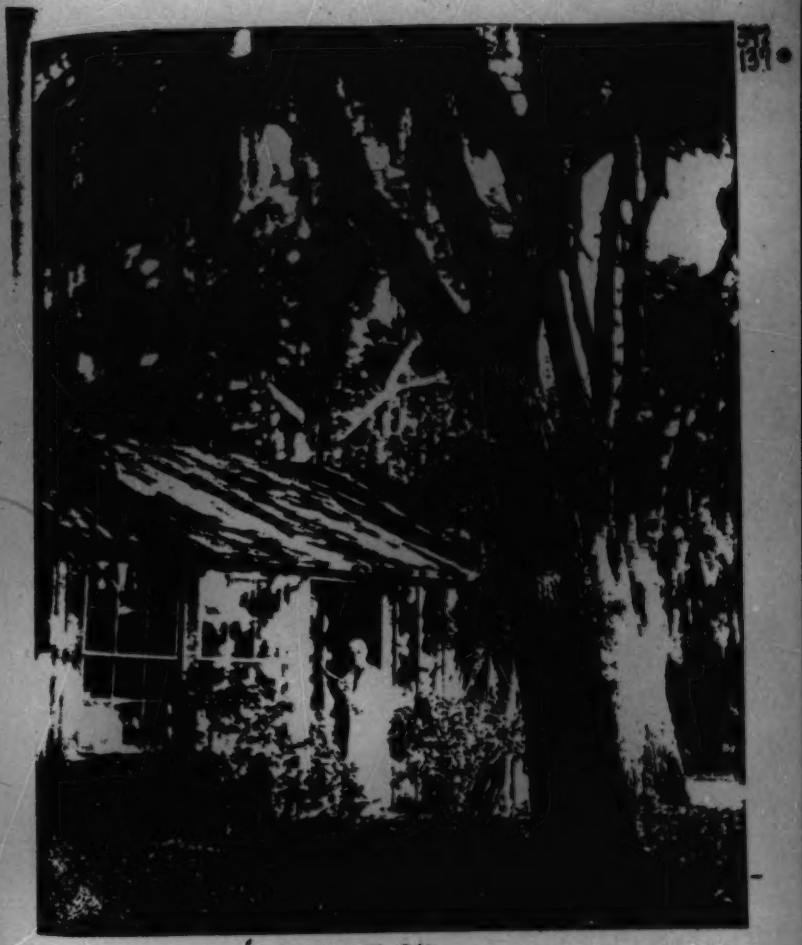
9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island



12. The Cabin

[facing p. 80]

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)

CHAPTER I

THE PRIZE OF THREE NATIONS

SAILING NORTHWARD in 1525 a hundred leagues from La Florida, Pedro de Quexos, pilot of Ayllon's two caravels, suddenly came upon a neck of land protruding abruptly seaward between two magnificent sounds. A closer examination showed the headland to be beautifully wooded with pines, cedars, and mighty live oaks gracefully festooned with funereal moss. Quexos thought that his saint, Elena, had certainly brought him good fortune in leading him to this garden spot on her day, and so in her honor he christened the projecting land in the name of Spain *Punta de Santa Elena*, and the broad river which bordered it Santa Elena. Today the point is the eastern projection of St. Helena Island, and Santa Elena River is now Port Royal Sound, but Ayllon's pilot gave the name which the English later applied to a sound, an island, and a parish.

THE SEA ISLANDS

St. Helena Island is one of the largest of the Sea Islands fringing the coast of South Carolina. It is fifteen miles in length and varies from three to five miles in width. Located practically midway by water between Charleston and Savannah, it is in the immediate vicinity of a natural harbor which was described by early explorers as one of the best on the entire Atlantic coast. Indeed, Jean Ribaut, commander of the first French expedition to Florida, pronounced it "one of the greatest and fayrest

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

CHAPTER IX

THE AFTERMATH

A ST. HELENA PICTURE IN 1865

IT WAS SUNDAY in May, 1865. The sandy road, covered in the low places with a top dressing of oyster shells, led off among the cotton fields down the Island. On either side were sagging wire fences, reminders of plantation boundaries before the war, the wire sometimes propped by drooping posts, at other times deeply embedded in the trunks of fine trees forming magnificent avenues.

Here and there were small frame houses, with narrow porches and four or five rooms, the residences of former overseers. Rude pine-log cabins, newly built, and clapboarded shanties leaning crazily in the mid-day sun dotted the fields. Gardens of growing vegetables separated the cabins from the rows of cotton that extended away as far as one could see. Little stakes occasionally marked off private holdings, sometimes the only boundaries in fields of a hundred or more acres of cotton. Just beyond was a large tract lying fallow, covered with a luxurious growth of cassina and dewberries, or perhaps a young forest of pines had sprung up among cotton furrows which, though idle for many years, were yet plainly visible.

The cotton was small, for it was not more than four weeks out of the ground, but the corn was knee high. Neat ridges were already piled up about the cabins waiting until the young sweet potato slips were large enough for transplanting. Here the fields were beautifully clean, carefully hilled up with the hoe by the women and old